DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 295 EA 023 850

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TITLE Public School Principals' Perceptions of Selected External Factors Affecting Job Performance.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Administrator Role; *Community Influence; Elementary Secondary Education; Expectation; *Federal Legislation; Job Performance; *Leadership Styles; *Principals; Public Schools; Role Perception; *State Action
IDENTIFIERS *Indiana (South); Indiana University Southeast; Pressure Groups

ABSTRACT

Based on principals' own perceptions, this paper examines how the principal's role has changed, what constitutes principals' major problems or concerns, and how state and federal regulations and community pressures have affected the principal's role. The project identified and interviewed 56 public school principals for an 11-county area served by Indiana University Southeast's school administration program. Table 1 reveals participants' reasons for becoming principals; table 2 reveals that half of the participants used an eclectic leadership style, 45 percent considered themselves democratic leaders, and 5 percent (of secondary principals only) considered themselves autocratic leaders. Results show that the principal's job has changed over the past 10 years; major changes include more time required, more paperwork, higher expectations, and greater accountability. Apathy, societal problems, and bureaucratic requirements have precipitated many of these changes. Federal and especially state mandates, regulations, and programs were major contributors to job change and made the principals' role more difficult. Community attitudes, beliefs, and opinions also contributed to job change. Experienced principals recommend that prospective principals understand the position's time requirements; have clear principles, goals, and objectives; keep children first; learn to manage and control pressure, stress, and conflict; be willing to make timely decisions; and keep themselves informed. Additional recommendations are provided. (20 references) (MLH)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION OF SELECTED EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING JOB PERFORMANCE

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School Administration Program
Indiana University Southeast
Spring 1992

EA 023 850

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What is the perception of Southern Indiana public school principals of their job and of the external forces affecting their job performance? Specifically how do these principals feel that the job of principal has changed in the last ten years and what are some of the external factors that have caused these changes? Some of the questions explored by this study are:

1. How has the role of the public school principal changed during the last decade?
2. What do principals consider the major problems or concerns faced by public school principals today?
3. What effects have state mandates and regulations had on the role of the public school principal?
4. What effects have federal regulations and programs had on the role of the public school principal?
5. What effects have community pressures had on the role of the public school principal?

HYPOTHESIS

The job performance of the public school principal has changed during the past decade, and much of the change is precipitated by factors that are external to system or building level requirements and expectations.

METHODOLOGY

The investigator identified fifty-six public school principals from an eleven county area served by the school administration program of Indiana University Southeast. After identification, interviews lasting approximately one hour were scheduled with each of the subjects. Using a ten-item interview schedule developed by the investigator, each of the subjects was interviewed by the investigator or by an interviewer trained by the investigator. Each of the trained interviewers was a graduate student in the school administration program at Indiana University Southeast. The schedule included questions designed to elicit some demographic data as well as the structured questions. The questions encouraged open ended responses and the interviewers were trained to encourage elaboration from the subjects.

Upon completion of the interviews, the investigator tabulated the responses. The open nature of the responses dictated use of nonparametric treatment with descriptive analysis. Percentages of responses were calculated. The data was subjected to descriptive analysis and findings, and conclusions were formulated. These findings and conclusions formulate the body of this study.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The decade of the sixties contributed more studies on the perceived roles of school administrators than any comparable period before or since. During this era schools found themselves under criticism from many sides. Schools were being blamed for scientific and mathematical deficiencies resulting from the Sputnik launching; for society's problems as reflected in the war on poverty, the civil rights movement and the war in Southeast Asia; and from the criticisms of critics such as Conant, Rickover and others. As a result, administrators appeared to feel a compelling need to re-examine, re-define and justify what they were doing. Never before had education, and educators at all levels, been the focus of so much attention. Study after study reflected the external pressure on the schools and upon the resulting changes in the roles of school people. Studies by Egner (4), Goodlad (8), Langer (14), Reisert (18) and Wood (20) are representative samples of the large volume of research conducted during this period. Indeed, review of the literature finds most of the studies on principal's role carried out during this decade.

Today schools are facing many of the same kinds of external forces and pressures. Administrators and teachers alike complain about the new demands and expectations created by public pressure, changing family and social structures and beliefs, state mandates, economic restrictions, and other environmental changes. While much of the literature reflects these concerns, very little to date has attempted to define the role or job changes that may or do occur. Review of more recent literature reveals few studies of the kind so common in the sixties. It is the intent of this investigator to attempt to build upon the structure of the older studies of the sixties and the relatively few studies subsequent to that era a study that would help fill the void in the literature.

The recent research literature identifies a need for studies on the influences of external pressures on education role or job expectation rather than on the principalship itself. Indeed there are few studies addressing the topic of this investigation. One study exploring the affect of external pressures on the role of the principal was Greenfield (9) who analyzed the work of school principals with emphasis upon the social, moral, and technical demands of the position. He found that external forces exerted significant role change in the principal's position. Evans (6) found that the same kinds of external factors modified the roles of principals in Australian school systems as did Ralph (17) in his studies of principals' and other administrators' performance in British Columbia. A slightly different finding was found in the study by Bunting (1). She concluded that while leadership style was influenced to some degree by both external forces and internal factors, the greatest determinator was the classroom orientation of the teachers assigned to the principal. Different conclusions were reached by Houlihan (12) and by Hess (11) in two independent studies. Houlihan (12) generalized that educators were too inclined to rely on traditional statistical data as a basis for school effectiveness and job definition but should, instead, develop and communicate to the public measures of social variables that operate in effective schools. Educators need to become more sensitive to public and societal expectations in their role definition and their job

performance. Hess (11) found that administrative practice has been revised sharply since 1959 and that present administrators must be more political and advocative while performing under more pressure and stress. Masse (16) used an external-internal influence model to examine where administrators fit within the complex network of forces influencing schools and school programs. He found principals' job expectations very susceptible to both external and internal forces. He concluded that the role of principal was subject to change in relationship to the forces exerted upon it.

Other studies were identified which dealt with role, job identification, or job performance but which did not primarily address the extent of influence of external factors. Some did, however, speak to this factor on a secondary or supporting basis. Sloan and Del Bene (19) surveyed principals and superintendents in an attempt to discover if there was congruence in their perception of the normative role of the principal. Their findings were consistent with those of Foskell (7) which also perceived principals as primarily administrators rather than "lead teachers." As such, they were more subject to external pressures than to internal pressures. Greenfield (1), in his study of assistant principals, concluded that from a sociological perspective, the existing knowledge base contributed little to understanding the character of the school setting and the internal and external pressures on the careers of his subjects. He concluded that additional study of external influences is essential to role clarification. Marshall (15), in her study of women in the superintendency, reported that while her subjects faced certain constraints that were unique to women, they also faced external forces that were changing the role of superintendency for both men and women candidates.

Each of these studies identifies the influence that external factors exert on the administrative job or role. Each verifies the need for additional research and study into the type and extent of external influences on job or role. It is interesting to note that none of the reported studies addresses directly the hypothesis stated in this proposal. It is also interesting to note that few of the existing studies are reported in the major administrative journals or periodicals. The void in both of these areas would, in the opinion of this investigator, speak directly to the need for a study of principals' perception of the role they fulfill and of the external forces helping shape this role.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The subjects in the study consisted of fifty-six southern Indiana public school principals. Thirty-five were elementary principals and twenty-one were secondary principals. Junior high school principals and middle school principals were considered secondary principals for purpose of this study. The population of elementary principals included seven women. Fifty-two percent of all principals had ten or more years of experience. Twenty percent had five to nine years of experience and twenty-eight percent had four or less years.

Study of Table 1 reveals that forty-one percent of the interviewees became principals because they felt that they could make a greater contribution as a principal or that they could have a bigger impact on education. Twenty-one percent entered the principalship because they liked the position and the prestige that accompanied the position. Eighteen percent wanted to get out of the classroom and to make a career change. Eighteen percent were encouraged or influenced to seek the principalship by a senior administrator or by a school board member. Surprisingly, only three percent indicated that money played a part in their entering the principalship. Little difference existed between elementary and secondary principal's reasons for entering the principalship.

Leadership style reported by the principal is reflected in Table 2. Study of Table 2 reveals that half of the principals reported that they used an eclectic leadership style. Forty-five percent considered themselves as democratic leaders and five percent considered themselves as autocratic leaders. Interestingly, none of the elementary principals reported their leadership style as being autocratic.

TABLE 1. REPORTED REASONS FOR BECOMING A PRINCIPAL.

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Could make greater contribution or have greater impact	38	43	41
Like the position and the prestige	14	26	21
Get out of the classroom and make career change	19	17	18
Was encouraged or influenced by senior administrator or board member	29	11	18
More money	4	2	3

TABLE 2. LEADERSHIP STYLE REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS.

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Eclectic	52	49	50
Democratic	33	51	45
Autocratic	14	0	5

FINDINGS

How has the Role of the Principal Changed During the Decade?

When principals were asked to elaborate on how the role of the principal had changed in the last decade, they identified the nine changes identified in Table 3. There appeared to be little difference in the responses of the elementary and secondary principals on this question. Thirty-two percent felt that there was more paper work generated by federal programs and regulations, by state mandates and regulations, and by local policies and procedures. The principals also mentioned the impact of reports, questionnaires, and surveys generated by public and private agencies, universities and professional organizations. Some respondents indicated that as much as forty percent of their time was devoted to paper tasks. Twenty-nine percent of the principals reported that they were required to spend more time working on problems generated by societal changes and societal ills. Among the problems enumerated were child abuse and neglect, latch key children, single parent families, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, and child custody and welfare programs. Twenty-three percent mentioned that administrators were expected to do more, and twenty percent indicated the new responsibilities and programs that principals were expected to oversee. When asked to give specific examples, they mentioned special needs programs, at risk programs, gifted and talented programs, breakfast programs, recreation programs and so on. Twenty percent of the principals believed that the principal is held more accountable for both his school's progress and his individual actions while eighteen percent reported a decrease in principal control and opportunity to make individual decisions. Other changes reported more expectations of principals, less money to work with, and more involvement of teachers in decision making.

TABLE 3. HOW HAS THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL CHANGED DURING THE LAST DECADE?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Paper work has increased greatly	33	31	32
More time spent on social problems	24	31	29
More expected of schools and principals	29	20	23
New responsibilities and programs to oversee	24	17	20
Increased accountability	24	17	20
Lessened control and opportunity to make decisions	24	15	18
More expectations of instructional leadership	5	20	14
Less money to work with	10	14	13
More involvement of teachers in decision making	10	11	11

What are the Major Problems Principals Face?

Principals were asked to indicate what they considered to be the major problems faced by today's principal. Study of Table 4 reveals apathy as the most frequently mentioned problem faced by the principal. Apathy was not limited to students but included apathy on the part of parents, teachers, and the public in general. Societal problems closely parallelled apathy and in many cases was listed as a cause-effect relationship. Problems mentioned included family unit breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, migrants, neglected and abused children, latch key families, at risk children, and religious, ethnic and racial differences. Thirty-four percent indicated increasing bureaucratic demands as a major problem and stated that these demands were at each level; local, state, and national. Thirty-four percent also reported that they lacked the time to perform their duties. Surprisingly, only sixteen percent listed lack of money as a major problem

TABLE 4. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS PRINCIPALS FACE?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Apathy	44	37	39
Societal problems	38	37	38
Bureaucratic demands	24	40	34
Lack of time to perform	46	14	34
Lack of money	14	17	16

What Effects Have State Mandates and Regulations Had on the Work of the Principal?

When asked this question, principals at all levels agreed that state mandates and regulations had made the work of the building level administrator increasingly difficult. Study of Table 5 reveals that ninety-three percent indicated that this was so (with very little difference in the ninety-four percent response of elementary principals and the ninety percent response of secondary principals). Fifty-two percent reported that state mandates and regulations had taken principals' time from more important duties and responsibilities. Study of Table 5 reveals that elementary principals felt this more than secondary principals. Elementary principals also felt more strongly than secondary principals that the state had generated much more paperwork and that the state regulations and mandates had reduced their autonomy and flexibility. Twenty-three percent of the principals reported that the state had kept the local schools on task and on track and that they generally felt that this was positive. Twenty percent felt that inadequate funding by the state diverted money from the general fund and hindered the other programs of the school.

TABLE 5. WHAT EFFECTS HAVE STATE MANDATES AND REGULATIONS HAD ON THE WORK ON THE PRINCIPAL?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Made the work more difficult	90	93	93
Has taken time from other responsibilities	43	57	52
Created more paperwork	29	54	45
Reduced autonomy and flexibility	24	51	41
Kept us on track and on task	14	29	23
Diverted local funds through inadequate funding	14	23	20

What Effects Have Federal Regulations and Programs had on the Work of the Principal?

This question elicited different responses between elementary and secondary principals as study of Table 6 reveals. Forty-three percent of the elementary principals and thirty-three percent of secondary principals stated that the federal regulations made a positive contribution. Fifty-seven percent of the secondary principals and twenty-nine percent of the elementary principals indicated that the programs and regulations had little or no effect. Forty-six percent of elementary principals reported federal programs and regulations increased their paper work while no secondary respondents reported this. Twice as many (twenty-nine percent) of the elementary principals reported that federal regulations required that they devote special attention to special needs students than did secondary principals (fourteen percent). Other differences were reported in the time required on federal regulations and programs with twenty-six percent of the elementary principals. Only ten percent of the secondary principals saw this as a problem. Twenty-three percent of the elementary principals saw federal program detracting from other priorities while none of the secondary principals reported this.

TABLE 6. WHAT EFFECTS HAVE FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND REGULATIONS HAD ON THE WORK OF THE PRINCIPAL?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Has little or no effect	57	29	39
Makes a positive contribution	33	43	39
Increases paper work	0	46	29
Requires more attention to special needs	14	29	23
Requires more time	10	26	20
Detracts from other priorities	0	23	14

What Effects Have Community Attitudes, Beliefs, and Opinions Had on the Work of the Principal?

When asked to respond to the effects of the community on the work of the principal, differences were apparent between the elementary and secondary levels as can seen in Table 7. Thirty-nine percent of all principals reported increased pressures in specific areas of the school program. When asked to elaborate, secondary principals reported that the pressures tended to center on the athletics and music programs. Elementary principals reported the pressures in specific curricular areas such as reading, gifted and talented, and special education. Thirty-eight percent of all principals reported increased expectations on the principal. Thirty-one percent of the elementary principals indicated increased support for the school and the principal while only fourteen percent of the secondary principals reported increased support. Conversely, decreased parental support and increased parental apathy was reported by twenty-six percent of the elementary and by ten percent of the secondary respondents. Twenty percent of the principals reported little or no change as a result of community attitudes, beliefs and opinions.

TABLE 7. WHAT EFFECTS HAVE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND OPINIONS HAD ON THE WORK OF THE PRINCIPAL?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Increases pressures in certain areas (e.g., athletics, gifted and talented, band, etc.)	33	43	39
Increases expectations on the principal	48	31	38
Increases support for the principal and school	14	31	25
Causes diminished parental support and increased apathy	10	26	20
Caused little or no change	14	23	20

What Advice Would You Give a Prospective Principal?

Study participants were asked to give their advice to a prospective candidate who was considering entering the principalship. Table 8 gives the responses to this question. More than half advised the candidate of the time requirements of the position and of the necessity of being willing to devote the necessary time to the job and to learning the techniques of time management. Many emphasized that this was not a concern for the principal alone, but it also affected the spouse and family. Several stressed the fact that unless the principal and the family understand this going in, they will experience stress and conflict later. Thirty-six percent of the principals emphasized the need to have a clear sense of purpose and direction and to keep students first in decision making. Both elementary and secondary principals felt it vital that goals and objectives drive administrative decision and operations. Thirty-four percent of the principals felt new principals must learn to handle pressure, control stress and manage conflict effectively. Several respondents mentioned the need to leave problems at school and to have a life outside the school. Thirty percent advised prospective principals to keep informed and current and to make timely decisions. While it was important to make timely decisions, twenty-three percent also stressed the importance of being flexible and being willing and able to compromise. Finally twenty-two percent indicated that being a good communicator was important. They emphasized that listening and reading skills were equally as important in communicating as speaking and writing skills.

TABLE 8. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A PROSPECTIVE PRINCIPAL?

Response	% Secondary	% Elementary	% Total
Understand the demands on time	67	43	52
Have solid principles, goals and objectives that place students first	38	34	36
Learn to handle pressures, control stress and manage conflict	19	43	34
Be willing to make timely decisions	33	29	30
Keep informed and current	38	26	30
Be flexible and willing to compromise	19	26	23
Be a good communicator	19	22	22

CONCLUSIONS

1. The job of principal has changed in the last ten years.
2. Major changes in the job include more time required, more paper work, higher expectations, and greater accountability.
3. Apathy, societal problems, and bureaucratic requirements have created many of the changes.
4. State and federal mandates, regulations, and programs were major contributors to job change.
5. Community attitudes, beliefs and opinions contributed to job change.
6. All principals felt state mandates and regulations had made their role more difficult and had taken time from more important responsibilities.
7. Elementary principals were more affected by state mandates and regulations than secondary principals.
8. Federal programs and regulations had less effect on principals' roles than did state ones.
9. Elementary principals were more affected by federal programs and regulations than secondary principals.
10. Experienced principals recommend that prospective principals understand the time requirements of the principalship; have clear principles, goals and objectives; keep children first; learn to manage and control pressure, stress and conflict; be willing to make timely decisions; and keep themselves informed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Incorporate an understanding of the expectations and demands of the principalship into principal education programs.
2. Revise federal and state programs and mandates to reduce the excessive time and paper work demands.
3. Provide additional assistance to the elementary principal to reduce or share some of the time and paper requirements.
4. Incorporate stress management and control techniques and methods into principal preparation programs and into in-service education programs for principals.
5. Incorporate conflict management techniques and methods into principal preparation programs and into in-service education programs for principals.
6. Conduct additional studies on the role of the principal and the external and internal factors affecting the principalship..

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